

COURT OFFERS treatment AS AN alternative

Drug treatment courts offer treatment to nonviolent offenders with drug problems in an effort to keep them out of prison, save the costs of incarceration and prevent future crimes.

Milwaukee County's Drug Treatment Court is coordinated by Carol Carlson, a 2011 graduate of UWM's Master of Science in Social Work program. Carlson's interest in the court began during her studies at UWM, when a winter break internship in New Orleans connected her with graduates of the drug treatment court there.

Excited by the concept, she worked with the Helen Bader School of Social Welfare (HBSSW) to set up an internship with Milwaukee's drug treatment court – with the goal of forming an alumni group and identifying prospective peer mentors. That experience helped her land her current position.

"As it happened, the Milwaukee County Drug Treatment Court coordinator retired as I was graduating," says Carlson. "I applied for the position and started in January 2012."

UWM has another major connection to the court. The two federal grants that launched the court in February 2009 require evaluations of the program. The Center for Applied Behavioral Health Research (CABHR), housed in HBSSW, provides this vital expertise. A third grant received at the end of 2012 extended the program for three more years.

Michael Fendrich, Wisconsin Distinguished Professor and professor of social work, and Thomas LeBel, CABHR scientist and associate professor of criminal justice, currently lead the evaluation, with the assistance of Gregory Powers, doctoral student in social work.



Carol Carlson (left) and Thomas LeBel

They are part of a team, headed by a judge, that includes prosecutors, public defenders, a Milwaukee Police Department law enforcement officer, program coordinator and treatment professionals from the Milwaukee County Behavioral Health Division. The court's coordinator and case managers are provided through JusticePoint, a Milwaukee-based nonprofit organization.

Carlson oversees the program, "making sure that we adhere to evidence-based practices and the protocols." Her monthly meetings with the UWM evaluators help determine where the program is doing well and where changes or improvements are needed.